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ABSTRACT

Facing declining enrollment, loss of state funds, and decreasing public confidence, the Salt Lake City Schools found several groups demanding a voice in the decision-making process. A plan for shared governance was implemented. Representatives of the teachers' association, the administrative association, and the classified employees' association were invited to attend the superintendent's staff meetings as voting members. Decision-making at the local school level was democratized through creation of School Improvement Councils, composed of faculty and administrators, and of School Community Councils, composed of the School Improvement Council members, parent teacher association representatives, school principals, and six additional community members. Both councils were designed to be active decision-making bodies rather than advisory groups. District ad hoc committees work to help resolve problems beyond the scope of single schools. (Author/PGD)

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SHARED GOVERNANCE

IN THE

SALT LAKE CITY SCHOOLS

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SHARED GOVERNANCE IN THE SALT LAKE CITY SCHOOLS

Early 1973 found the Salt Lake City School District confronted with many problems. Basic, however, was the decline of student enrollment from a high of some 42,000 students in 1958 to 29,180 in 1973. In attempting to adjust to such a massive decline in enrollment and subsequent loss of State funds, the district found itself facing a multitude of difficult situations: lack of confidence between the newly formed seven member Board of Education--formerly twelve members through December of 1972--and the Superintendent; contention between the employee groups and the administration; and, general lack of support from the patrons of the district. Clearly the pattern of unilateral decision-making within the district was not responding to the basic need of the constituent groups: patrons, Board of Education, teachers, classified employees and administration. Mistrust and suspicion were constant elements in district activities. The message was clear--all groups wanted to be a part of the decision-making process for the district. Past techniques of advisory councils and committees were not sufficient to satisfy the needs, particularly those of the community; yet, it was clear that the legal framework of the responsibility of the Board of Education had to be maintained.

Following a nationwide search for a new superintendent, the Board of Education appointed Dr. M. Donald Thomas, and he began his responsibilities as Superintendent of the Salt Lake City School District on July 5, 1973. Don Thomas had previously served as an administrator in Illinois, New York and California and brought to the assignment a much needed expertise in problem solving and in cooperative political action. It was Superintendent Thomas that introduced the concept of "Shared Governance" to the district.

The needs of the district: 1) how to most efficiently adjust to declining enrollment, 2) how to maintain fiscal integrity and 3) how to increase public confidence in the schools, had been clearly identified. The task now was how to achieve the solution to these problems that would be acceptable to all groups in the district.

Essentially each group had to be convinced that it would share in the decision-making process for the district. To initiate this procedure the teacher association president and executive secretary, the administrative association president and executive secretary and the classified employees president were invited to attend the Superintendent's staff meetings and be full-functioning members of that decision-making group with voting rights.

To bring the shared governance process to each local school, there was developed among all parties concerned the concept of governance groups: School Improvement Councils and School Community Councils. The School Improvement Council was established in each school from the faculty and administration of the school to provide orderly and professional means of improving the educational program and conditions within the school. Organization of the School Improvement Council was designated as follows:

For Elementary Schools

One representative from primary grades, one representative from the intermediate grades, and the SLTA faculty representative, principal and secretary or custodian.

For Intermediate Schools - grades seven and eight

One representative from the non-academic areas, one representative

from the academic subject areas, the SLTA faculty representative, principal and one administrative assistant, one representative from the counseling staff, faculty advisor to student government (if other than administrator) and secretary or custodian.

For High Schools

One representative from the non-academic subject areas, one representative from the academic subject areas, SLTA faculty representative, one representative from the counseling staff, principal and one assistant administrator and secretary or custodian.

For all groups it was provided that additional participation or representation on the Council would be determined as the need arises. That the School Improvement Council was to be actively engaged in the decision-making process was assured by these provisions:

a. Individual members of the Council were to introduce any items of business or points of view that were to be considered by the Council.

b. Minutes of each Council meeting were to be recorded so that recommendations and actions could be published and distributed throughout the school.

c. The Council was mandated to meet monthly and oftener if the business dictated, with the chairman to be elected by the Council. Operating procedures were to be determined by the Council.

d. The Council was authorized to establish and implement procedures and programs for the individual school consistent with the policies of

the Board of Education and subject to ratification by the faculty of the school and approved by the superintendent.

e. Items beyond the scope of the School Improvement Council were to be referred to the Administration and the Teachers Association by the chairman of the Council, or the chairman could go directly to the superintendent.

Thus with the professional and classified employees tied directly into the governance of the school district through the participation in staff meetings and the School Improvement Council, the next objective was the involvement of the patrons. This was accomplished through the establishment of the School Community Council in each school, which also tied in with the School Improvement Council in that these members combined with the principal, the PTA president and the PTA first vice president to form the School Community Council. Added to the School Community were three community members, each nominated by the principal, PTA president and PTA first vice president. Each of these three community members in turn nominated another community member for a total representation of eight community members on the School Community Council. Specific guidelines were established for additional aspects of membership and procedures:

a. Representation was to be considered from minority groups and all geographic areas of the school in the selection of membership.

b. The School Community Council was empowered to appoint ad hoc committees and the findings of such committees were to be reported to the Council.

c. Additional participation or representation on the Council was to be determined by the Council as the need arose.

d. Minutes of the Council proceedings were to be recorded and distributed to the members.

In general it was provided that the School Community Council under the philosophy of shared governance of the Salt Lake City School District should participate actively in the decision-making process for the school rather than in an advisory capacity. Like all other governance or administration units of the district, the School Community Councils were to operate within the guidelines of the Board of Education policy, budget, ethics and law.

The objectives for the School Community Councils can best be presented by the charge given by Superintendent Thomas to the councils:

> Schools operate best when there is close cooperation between home and school. Shared Governance is a method for establishing that cooperation. A strong partnership between home and school results in benefits for students and creates a positive climate in the schools. It also provides parents and teachers opportunities to develop excellence in all that is done.
>
> The School Community Council extends local decision-making to each local school unit. It is there that decisions can best be made concerning those items that augment Board of Education policies. It is at the local level that what is best for the school can be decided. Working in harmony with the Board of Education, each school can decide local issues which support the values and desires of the school patrons and teachers.
>
> The Councils are charged with important responsibilities. Their decisions affect the lives and education of many children.

It is their obligation to decide fairly, to adjudicate for justice, and to create relationships which support cooperation and orderly processes. Recognizing Board policies, abiding by state and federal regulations, staying within the budget limits, and promoting ethical practices, the School Community Council are a tremendous asset to the Salt Lake City School District and make a significant contribution to the operation of our schools.

When problems exceed the scope of the local School Community Council, the problem is referred to the district, and an ad hoc committee is appointed by the Board of Education. Such was the case in the matter of declining secondary school student enrollments. It was necessary to make some adjustment to lower secondary enrollments either by closing a high school or three junior high schools. A district ad hoc committee was formed to study the problem. The recommendation was to change the organization of the Salt Lake City schools from K-6, 7-9 and 10-12 to a K-6, 7-8 and 9-12, placing the ninth-grade students in the senior high schools, thus closing three of the nine junior high schools and changing the other six to intermediate units. This recommendation was presented to the Board of Education and after extensive community hearings and involvement, was accepted by the Board. A similar process of community hearings and in-put determined which of the three junior high schools were to be closed and such closures were accomplished with less difficulty than had ever been experienced by the district in closing any of the twenty-three pervious schools.

To intensify public confidence in the schools, Dr. Stanley R. Morgan was given responsibility to provide information to the public, to develop

collaborative activities with other agencies, and to strengthen the research functioning of the district. The Research and Public Information Department also supervises public opinion polls, public evaluation projects, and external research activities. Strong partnerships were also built with media sources and community leaders.

The immediate and long range objective for Shared Governance in our Salt Lake City Schools is to provide a system whereby the patrons expectation for meaningful involvement can be channeled into the most productive accomplishment for our students. Certainly such is the basic desires of all groups of the district and is the advantage it can offer to other districts willing to participate in Shared Governance. Such participation, however, must be genuine--parents, teachers, administrators and the Board Members must be true partners or chaos can easily be the result.

Moving into the concept of Shared Governance does require effort and the education of your staff. Principals can easily see it as a dilution of their authority if they are conditioned to the unilateral line and staff decision-making process. With patience and example such individuals will come to see Shared Governance provides them with new opportunities for leadership, and extends the power base for decisions. School regulations no longer can be challenged at the "whim" of the principal, but are now the considered judgment of a group of interested and concerned professionals and parents and as such has their support.

Citizen involvement in the decision-making processes of the schools is an expectation the patrons of the Salt Lake City School District hold very high.

My personal, considered judgment is that it is likewise a growing expectation and held by many patrons throughout the State of Utah. Involvement of parents in insignificant tasks that have little or no real meaning in the operation of their schools will soon--if not now--no longer be tolerated by intelligent parents and community members. The Shared Governance procedure that we have developed in the Salt Lake City Schools has been one way we have met this expectation. It is not advocated that Salt Lake City School District's method of Shared Governance should be "the" method for your district. The challenge is yours to develop "your" method of providing for meaningful parent involvement in the school decision-making process. The task is a challenge--the rewards tremendous.